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Efficiency of coordination of European policies at domestic level – challenging Polish coordination system

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Abstract

Coordination is reaching agreements through consistent operation of various parts of the system to achieve a particular purpose. Efficiency is one of the key concepts relating to the coordination of EU policies in the Member States of the EU. Although there are several tools to measure efficiency of coordination on domestic level, such as the scale of Metcalfe and benchmarks of the World Bank, there is no complex set of tools to measure the multifaceted efficiency of coordination. This paper consists of two main parts: 1/ analysis of efficiency of coordination of EU policies in the Polish government institutions using existing methods of evaluating efficiency and analysis of required improvements in the coordination system of Poland, 2/ analysis of possible improvements in measuring efficiency of coordination of EU policies, based on the paradigm of New Public Management and using theories typical for modeling business processes in private companies. The paper bases on qualitative research conducted in Polish ministries involved in domestic coordination. The research results show certain lacks in efficiency of coordination in Poland according to traditional tools of measuring efficiency. At the same time use of these tools does not allow for proper diagnosis and finding solutions to recent problems of coordination. Recommendations give some solutions to challenges of efficient coordination on domestic level using broader set of tools for measuring coordination efficiency.

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1. Introduction

Efficiency is one of the most important factors justifying systems of coordination of European policies in the

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Member States. Coordination is reaching agreements through consistent operation of various parts of the system to achieve a particular purpose. Efficiency is one of the key concepts relating to the coordination of EU policies in the Member States, because it determines the sense and legitimizes existence of the system of coordination. Efficiency refers to the overall system of coordination, which embraces legal basis of the system activities, institutions involved in coordination, finally relations between the institutions, including communication and actual division of tasks among them. Efficiency of coordination should be analyzed in two main dimensions: internal and external. Internal dimension of coordination efficiency refers to efficient functioning of the institutions involved, their proper quality management [1]. External dimension refers to proper identification of key interests of the Member States in the European Union, efficient representation of these interests on European level (in the EU institutions), adequate reaction to the impulses and incentives sent by the EU. From this point of view it seems reasonable to distinct two separate categories of efficiency: 1/ one referring to the ratio of outputs to inputs – usually called “efficiency” and 2/ the other referring to overall efficiency in achieving certain purposes and meeting targets regardless of the price – usually identified as effectiveness. Difference between internal and external dimension of efficiency, in this case also relating to difference between efficiency and effectiveness, was explained in an interesting way by Peter Drucker, Austrian specialist in the field of management. He wrote that: “<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/peterdruck134881.html>Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things” [2].

The main thesis of this speech is that the biggest challenge for coordination system in Poland is enhancement of knowledge management and human resources management. It can be done mainly by merging and unification of electronic systems supporting the coordination process in various institutions (document exchange, communication, division of tasks) and developing new ones, compatible with already existing. The electronic systems should put responsibilities on officials involved in coordination while taking from them unnecessary organizational burden typical for existing system. Traditional tools measuring levels of coordination in the Member States do not sufficiently take into account the above mentioned lacks, furthermore, they do not take into consideration the input-output ratio in coordination.

2. Efficiency of coordination of EU policies in Poland according to existing methods of evaluation

There are several tools to measure efficiency of coordination on domestic level (mainly related to efficiency of acting of national public administrations, which refers to internal dimension of coordination efficiency). One of the most well known tools is a so-called “Metcalf scale” (since it was invented by Les Metcalfe). The scale implies existence of 9 different levels of efficiency of coordination process — from the level of an overall strategy to the level of independent decision-making by institutions or organizations involved [3].

The scale has both descriptive and axiological meaning since it not only evaluates coordination in certain countries according to the level of efficiency it achieves but also points out standards to be followed in order to improve the efficiency.

It is worth noting that there is no country in the EU having achieved the highest level on the scale.

Scale of policy coordination by Les Metcalfe: Level 1. Independent decision is making within the organization -> Level 2. Communication with other organizations -> Level 3. Consultation with other organizations (feedback) -> Level 4. Avoiding significant differences between organizations -> Level 5. Seeking for agreement on policies -> Level 6. Arbitration in matters of political differences -> Level 7. Setting the operational parameters -> Level 8. Defining priorities -> Level 9. Overall strategy.

The precondition for analysis of efficiency of coordination in Poland on the basis of Metcalfe scale is that coordination is indispensable for both realization of interests of Member States in the EU and the EU goals generally. The main reason of setting out this precondition is multiplicity of actors on EU multi-level institutional system scene. On the scale it is necessary to achieve all lower levels first in order to reach higher levels. Therefore, it is impossible that a certain Member State has a unified strategy for operation of various institutions involved in coordination process without having efficiently implemented standards of their mutual communication. Metcalfe scale as a tool for measuring efficiency of coordination does not take into consideration input-output ratio but it sets out certain benchmarks. There are, however, other benchmarks – of the so-called “Common Assessment Framework” (CAF) of the European Institute of Public Administration, which are useful in indicating standards and, on their basis, levels of coordination efficiency in the EU member states [4]. These standards include, among others, situations in which: expectations of each institution are clearly articulated and related to different levels of

coordination: governmental level, level of ministries, agencies, departments and individuals; objectives of governmental and ministerial level are clear and are reflected in objectives and plans at lower levels; there is a clear division of responsibility for different tasks within the system of coordination, and all actors are aware of who is responsible for what; expected results of specific activities are defined before performing these activities; there must be provided adequate resources to implement coordination activities; institutions have some flexibility in coordination activities; there is a system of internal audit, control and improvement of functioning of the administration; and finally there is a possibility to mobilize adequate human resources. Metcalfe's scale refers to situation in which certain level has or hasn't been achieved, while Common Assessment Framework provides for more complex perception of the criteria determining levels of coordination efficiency. CAF levels may be analyzed as "planned", "planned and executed", "planned, executed and checked" and finally "planned, performed, checked, improved and adapted".

The coordination can be considered efficient if it reaches at least the fifth level on the scale. High efficiency related to performance on levels 7 and 8 has only been achieved by France [5] and United Kingdom (the latter is, however, slightly lower than France). Definitely low on the Metcalfe scale – on level 2 - have been Poland and Slovakia [6]. It should be, however, underlined that Poland was evaluated before 2009 when a complex reform of coordination was implemented. The reform seems to have raised the level of Polish performance by 1-2 levels, however, a result of a qualitative research conducted in Polish ministries gives an overview of many problems still leaving Poland far behind France in coordinating European matters. The biggest barrier to achieve higher level on the Metcalfe scale turns out to be overcoming differences among organizations involved in coordination. In comparison, among the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe the highest ranks in the Baltic countries: Lithuania and Latvia reach level 5, while Estonia ranks level 4, mainly due to the decentralized structure of the institutional coordination and the large degree of autonomy of ministries.

As for the CAF benchmarks, Poland meets them to a small extent (reaches level 0.5). The problems placing Poland so low on the CAF scale are mainly related to human resources and political influence. There is a lack of transparency in appointment of officials involved in defining strategies and evaluating outcomes of the coordination system. There is no sufficient clarity regarding responsibilities of core institutions involved in coordination (e.g. Committee of European Matters – KSE) and division of tasks among various institutions. Therefore, administration sometimes doesn't "speak with one voice". An important issue is also flexibility in cooperation with European institutions and quick reaction to any incentives from them. In this regard, as it turns out, all new Member States are doing no better than average due to ineffective system of delegating responsibilities and, even more importantly, poor enforcement of specific tasks. Unfortunately, in almost all these countries, and Poland is no exception, public administration is considered a place from which it is difficult to be removed (regardless of the performance), which reflects low level of accountability within the system of coordination. This in turn leads to low motivation in carrying out this task by officials.

To sum up the question of the efficiency of coordination of EU policies on domestic level in Poland, according to the scale of Metcalfe and CAF benchmarks, unfortunately, Poland remains one of the least effective Member States. Best in the class are here the Baltic States. What is quite significant and paradoxical, Poland has been perceived as one of the few Member States having a well-functioning administrative machinery enabling Poland forcing national interests in the EU (e.g. Eastern Dimension). This picture of Poland occurs frequently among commentators and politicians at European Summits. Meanwhile, World Bank report on capacity of Polish administration points out that this impression is misleading, because the "loudest" matters related to defense of Polish interests in the EU were political, hardly related to the administrative reality of coordination [7].

3. Problems of the coordination system in Poland not diagnosed by "traditional" tools

On the basis of 7 interviews conducted with heads (5) and leading experts (2) of departments coordinating EU policies in 5 Polish ministries, there have been pointed out the most important problems of coordination of EU policies in Poland and new means of measuring efficiency of coordination.

The list of problems related to efficiency of coordination in Poland consists of the following aspects:

a/ lack of knowledge among politicians and officials on coordination strategies at various levels (other thing is that these strategies tend to be "far from reality" and/or inefficient), b/ lack of tools facilitating prioritization of the objectives and tasks of coordination based on the EU and national documents (especially strategic), c/ lack of tools enabling proper division of responsibilities, effective communication among competent authorities and/or officials

involved in coordination as well as duplication of tasks resulting from procedural and substantive mistakes, d/ treating European policies as a separate areas of operations, while they should be parts of national policies (access to the knowledge base of these institutions and officials who are not "assigned" to European), e/ lack of uniform procedures and access to best practices in various institutions involved in coordination, f/ lack of knowledge base to be used for Impact Assessment, g/ resistance of officials towards new tools enhancing efficient communication, task management and task assignment to officials (due to the fact that they usually require some time to be acquainted with).

A majority of above mentioned problems result from a lack of technical and merit-oriented knowledge base, streamlining preparation of instructions and Polish positions in European institutions. There are also not many efficient mechanisms of information exchange with external partners involved in shaping European policies. There is no single complex system "linking" institutions of different levels of multi-level system of the EU in the context of coordination (e.g. Members of Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, officials of the Permanent Representation, Prime Minister Chancellery and sectorial ministries) and therefore it is often difficult to properly diagnose problems in the coordination process within the system (without a uniform management system such problems are hardly detectable) and to find ways to repair them (the system should monitor work of officials and enable them use of already gathered and applicable procedures). The system should enable easy access to targets and indicators set up within the system of coordination as well as to best practices.

4. Possible improvements in measuring efficiency of coordination based on the paradigm of New Public Management and using theories typical for modeling business processes in private companies

Les Metcalfe and Eduardo Zapico Goñi noticed that the effectiveness of coordination of EU policies can be seen by various groups in different ways, depending on the culture of administration in these countries. For example, in Belgium information that a group of representatives of Belgian national administration in European institutions managed to reach a compromise on some issue is seen as considered a success, while the same information in the UK would be considered a failure and "surrender". This is due to different negotiating approaches in public administrations but also to society's attitude towards European integration. In this light it is important to take into consideration while measuring efficiency also administrative culture in certain member states [8].

In terms of the New Public Management, more important to efficient coordination of the EU policies than strategies and parameters are the officials' achievements, their qualitative performance and their proper connection to other resources in the system. One of the most important features of public administration in this approach is the culture of organization of the administration on the basis of human resources. Civil servants are recruited to work on a competitive basis, their structure is not hierarchical but mainly "flat" and the role of managers cannot be attributed solely to the traditional steering, but also building consensus, pointing out proper patterns and ethical conduct. The organizational culture of administration in this paradigm should be characterized as flexible, innovative, and focused on such approaches as: problem solving and entrepreneurship, data issues, conscious participation of officials in setting up operational goals, and finally use of modern technology. What is also important, New Public Management refers to officials' performance based on managing business processes and as such should be measured with the use of tools related to business processes.

The business process "is a logical sequence of activities of the entity in delivery of services. The result of a business process is a service that is requested and accepted by both internal and external "customers". The process is, therefore, a set of activities carried out within clearly defined limits, the aim of which is to achieve a specific result. Sample results of processes in the public administration are: administrative decision issued, prepared draft laws or regulations applicable to the minister, etc. In the case of co-ordination of the EU policies, processes are complex, involving many actors. There are some tools regulating and measuring business processes in the Polish public administration (e.g. Business Processes Modeling Notation, Service Oriented Architecture), however, their disadvantage is that they require specific knowledge in both modeling business processes and in the area of information technology. They also do not take into consideration such features of coordination as: a/ going beyond structure of the central government (towards the EU institutions and other EU Member States), b / high pressure of time, c / issues are not addressed to external users - citizens and are "locked" in the internal circuit of central government, d / domestic coordination is related to changes in the structure and political context of functioning of Polish government. Bearing all this in mind, the efficiency indicators in coordinating European policies on domestic level should be related to the paradigm of New Public Management and application of business processes modeling

in public administration. The most important of them could be:

- number of officials involved in managing business processes while coordinating the EU policies
- number of mistakes in the knowledge management system supporting coordination
- time necessary to exchange information among institutions involved in coordination
- time necessary to involve newly employed official into efficient implementation of their tasks
- number of external actors involved (consulted NGOs, experts in certain fields)
- amount of data collected as a knowledge base for Impact Assessment of a certain legal act coordinated
- number of Impact Assessments positively verified (as having properly modeled the impact) a few years after adoption and implementation of the legal act
- number of other Member States convinced to support the Polish position
- number of legal acts adopted in line with Polish positions and percentage of properly implemented into Polish laws EU legal acts
- number of improperly organized, cancelled and postponed meetings of various bodies involved in coordination

5. Recommendations

The first recommendation for Polish institutions and individuals dealing with coordination, no matter how strange it may sound, is: “More coordination in coordination”, which means better and more efficient ICT tools of managing business processes in Polish administration. There is also recommended creation of a substantive knowledge base, streamlining preparation of instructions and Polish positions in European institutions [9]. The knowledge management system should both fill in the gap in technological support for coordinating institutions as well as solve numerous problems arising from dysfunctions of the already existing systems (e.g. poor user experience, incoherent information infrastructure).

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